

Staff's job is analysis, not promotion – January 16 Penticton Herald

Dear Editor:

Recent comments by Penticton's director of development services, Blake Laven, regarding the proposed Spiller Road subdivision development are concerning.

Laven states there's "misinformation" currently circulating. The remedy for that is simple: have the developer, along with the City, provide citizens the necessary information on the development proposal.

Since city staff are reviewing the application and determining how to proceed, addressing that information gap should be easy.

Curiously, the developer hasn't posted their recent application as they did with their original concept.

The initial proposal's mysterious (and non-functional) road/utility endings at the property's north end now seem explained by real estate listings for adjacent properties, citing subdivision potential. Let's call this the "potato chip factor," because allowing one often leads to others.

Apparently, the site is "one of the few pieces left where hillside development would be allowed to satisfy our housing needs."

However, Penticton's OCP indicates that the Upper Wiltse area alone would provide for an estimated 800 new residential lots. Ultimately, the City must also rely on intensifying Penticton's urban footprint through densification and possibly more commuting from satellite locales.

Laven claims their financial analysis shows “hefty returns” to the City. Are these gross or net returns? Are capital costs of extending water supply (including “fire flows”), as well as installing sanitary and storm sewers all factored in?

Are costs of all required road upgrades and access improvements considered? Rigor and transparency are required, as this is not a simple extension of the city.

This subdivision is neither a simple or logical extension of existing development. What are projected servicing and maintenance costs? What percentage of those will be borne by Penticton taxpayers? What will it cost the City to service lots in this development, relative to sites with simpler road and utility extensions?

Infrastructure development and maintenance costs on Naramata Bench must be higher than conventional developments due to distance, access, rough terrain and other constraints.

Laven’s assumption that the proposed subdivision will be a “huge attraction” for upper-income professionals isn’t assured. Buyers have alternatives, and often select communities before identifying their specific, preferred sites. Interface fire risks, First Nations opposition, environmental and access issues, an adjacent regional garbage dump, and geotechnical suitability must all be considered and addressed.

Available information is inadequate. City staff must share their conclusions with taxpayers rather than simply claiming “hefty” benefits.

Their job is analysis, not promotion.

Denis O’Gorman

Penticton